

Regret is the secret you keep

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Regret is the secret you keep

by [insomnikat](#)

Summary

Giving into passion can seem terrifyingly like losing one's self. In some ways it is... but it's self-discovery, too, and transformation.

Also: It's not cheating if it's just dreaming.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

The first time they kiss, it's warm. Gentle. As sweet and as pure as their childhood memories. It is everything she ever imagined it would be with Mal and when she pulls back, radiant and smiling, it's with vindication of having made the right choice. Mal is her true north, her safety, and everything that is good and worth fighting for in this world. He will protect her and support her for as long as he lives.

But not as long as you'll live.

At night, she closes her eyes and traces the line of her collarbone with her fingers. The antlers are fully absorbed but she can still feel the memory of it on her skin. She can still feel the memory of his hands there, too-- confident in his claim of her -- and it chills her to the bone.

Kirigan-- no, *Aleksander* -- was as much a part of her now as the antlers.

He is the opposite of Mal and everything she'd been warned a girl should stay away from. He is a man of power, he is handsome and silver-tongued, and he has secrets as dark and deep as his eyes when they turn her way. The intensity in which he gazed at her the first time they met... his feline eyes narrowing, dazzled by the brightness of her and the irresistible possibilities she represented... made clear he desired her in ways that were not all chivalrous.

Over the next few weeks and months they circled each other. Warily, at first; in a dance of dark and light as old as time. It was obvious to all who watched in the Little Palace. Eventually, Alina learnt to hold his gaze. She learnt to show him his attentions were not all unwanted.

The first time they kiss, it's a jolt of lightning. It fires her up from her lips to her core. She is a matchstick, he is the spark, and every time they touch afterwards, she ignites.

She refuses to think of him by the other name. It's cruel and prejudiced and marks him a *thing* rather than a person. Even after he'd used her, hurt her, betrayed her. He probably wouldn't even bat an eye if she did, in a fit of rage, spit *Darkling* in his face. But she hasn't because the fact is...

The fact is...

There cannot be light without there first being darkness.

She dreams of him-- alone, standing over the map, brooding. Always brooding. Just like the one sleepless night she'd wandered restlessly and found herself at his door.

You always come back to this. Why?

Her hands touch the doorframe just as his visage turns to look at her. "It's the first time I... truly... felt something for you."

Pity?

The visage smiles at her in greeting, soft and companionable. "Kinship," she answers. "But then you fed me a line: 'I have buried so many...' and I was taken by how *beautifully* you wore your heartaches." She tries not to roll her eyes in disgust. He'd shown her the most vulnerable version of himself and she'd fallen for it-- hook, line, and sinker.

It wasn't a lie. Only part of a truth.

She reaches for the collar of his kefta and forces the visage to look down at her. "So tell it to me. The whole truth. All of it."

All? I have lived centuries. Lived countless lives and lost just as many loves, if not more. You think me cruel and my heart cold. But the truth is, I'd forgotten what true warmth felt like a long time ago.

His visage dissolves in her hands and another takes its place. Exactly the same but somehow darker. Angrier. And with genuine pain in its eyes. She steps away but he follows her. Closes the distance. Pins her back against a table and pierces her with a gaze that makes her heart race and her body burn hot with desire.

“The truth,” he says, lips moving for the first time in sync with the voice, crisp and anguished, “is I had waited a very long time for you and you... surprised me.”

He is no visage. The look of surprise that crosses her face means she understands this much. He cups her face strongly with one hand and is mesmerised by her complete lack of fear. Even as his darkness consumes her dream world, she remains unfazed. Defiant. Her eyes wild but searching. He pulls back just a little and studies her in turn. “What are you seeking?”

“Remorse.”

“For what?”

“For what you did to me.”

The grip on her face tightens as he leans menacingly close. “*You betrayed me* first.” Centuries of experience had taught him that swift and decisive action was the correct response. It reduced the chances of a counter-attack and spared him hundreds of lives-- and his heart --in the process. “You RAN the moment Baghra pointed and called me ‘monster’.”

“I was afraid!” she cries, pushing him back. For reasons he cannot fully explain, he lets her. “How was I *supposed* to react after being told you’re not a descendent but THE Black--” Alina swallows, unwilling to finish the name. “That you lied to me, lied to *everyone* about who you are!”

He folds his hands calmly in front of him and lifts his chin. His dark eyes narrow with a barely-restrained sneer. “I had *hoped* with the benefit of a doubt. Before we were so... unfortunately interrupted... you’d been ready to trust me. Completely. With your body.”

A hand whips up at his face and he catches it before it can make contact. Trapped in his hold once more, she bares her teeth and growls. “A mistake I’m glad I didn’t make.”

They stare each other down, each too stubborn to back down, until the anger simmers into something else. Something just as hot but burning for wholly different reasons between them. Alina tries to jerk her hand from his grip but he tightens it and draws her closer instead.

Seduction is easy. He’s had centuries to perfect it to the point that he can do it with his eyes closed (which, coincidentally, is needed to tap into Miss Starkov’s dreams). But romance? That requires a show of genuine affection. Unfortunately, his mother had never believed in coddling. *Depending on others is weak* she’d said as she’d deprived his child-self the base comfort of a familial embrace. He’d had to wipe his own tears until he’d learnt to not cry at all.

The fire in his eyes quiet and he drops his hold of her. He takes a step back, frowning a little as he looks away. He’d forgotten how young Alina was. True youth, still in her first lifetime; quick to lash out in fear and anger when she’s backed into a corner. Feeling hurt. Uncertain.

Her head cocks suddenly and, much to his surprise, her face contorts into an impish smirk. “A-ha!” she cries in childish triumph. The irony is not lost to him. “There it is,” she declares, chin lifted confidently as she points at his face. “Regret. You *regret* me.”

Displeased and annoyed, he discontinues the dream.

“Is this real?” she asks the next time she dreams.

He takes her hand in his, holds her face with the other, and presses her full body against his. “Does it feel real?”

He is wearing his old uniform, rich black kefta and all, and yet it feels like nothing but her thin nightdress separates her from her dark desire. She shivers as he bends down to plant kisses down her neck.

“It feels like... the night of the fete. In the drawing room. Before we...” She tries to push him away but his hold is firm. He lifts his gaze back up to hers and her heart beats wildly like a wounded deer caught in his hunter’s line of sight. She cannot look away. “Was any of this real? Or were you just... showing me what you thought I needed to--”

His grip on her tightens in warning. “See me as human?”

She swallows. She may have even nodded.

“I never lied to you, Alina. If you had stayed--”

“You would have told me?” she snorts. “Before or after you used me for my powers?”

His jaw tightens. She was even more stubborn and spirited in sleep than she was awake. “When you were ready.”

Visibly unhappy with his response and the spell broken, she withdraws from him. “And now it’s too late.”

If there is one constant in his very long, long life, it was this: people were unpredictable. No matter how much he prepared, no matter how much he anticipated, nothing ever worked out exactly as he wanted them to.

That, if anything, is the curse he bears.

He'd mocked the boy for not having the same luxury of Time as he did, but the truth was that even after all these centuries and with the prize still so tantalizingly close, he finds himself to have very little in terms of patience.

Time was simply NOT moving fast enough to fix things for him.

"What am I doing?" she sighs, stretching herself out on the meadow grass.

He climbs over her and nips her ear, delighting in the gasp that escapes her lips. His hand tangles in a fistful of her hair and pulls it just enough to bare her neck to him. He kisses down the invisible outline of the collar he knows is there, marking her forever as his, and smiles when she releases a breathy moan.

"Regretting," he murmurs as he makes his way back up to her lips. "What could've been."

He captures her mouth with his and kisses her with the same fervor of the last (only) good night they almost had together. A groan escapes him when her body arches up to meet his. Wanting. Willing. "This isn't regret," she gasps when they break for air. "This is..."

She stares up at her dream sky and for a moment, she stops responding to his attentions. He doesn't care to see what she sees, but he can hazard a guess and he bites her lower lip possessively. A hand slides between her legs and fingers press commandingly onto her sex. He looks down at her, victorious, as her eyes roll back and she cries out in pleasure.

In their last encounter in the waking world, she'd looked him right in the eye and told him they could have had this. All of it. He knows he ruined his chance in this lifetime, but there would be another soon enough. As he lifts her to newfound levels of pleasure, he is reminded how giving into passion can seem terrifyingly like losing one's self. In some ways it is... but it's self-discovery, too, and transformation. In this moment, right before his eyes, she is unravelling into something far greater than anything he's ever hoped and dreamed.

And she is mesmerizing.

“Cry my name,” he whispers into her ear. “Call for me and I will show you just how special you truly are.”

So she does. Over and over.

Because the beauty of dreams is they’re not real. And they’re yours and yours alone.

When Alina sees him again, very much alive, she is horrified. The problem is, she’s not quite sure what about him horrified her more: the fact that he survived the Fold, just not in one piece. Or the way he looked at her, smiled, and *knew* her deepest, darkest secret.

End Notes

Between writings I can be found [stalking quietly around Tumblr](#). Is there a fandom strictly for Kirigalina/Kirilina? If so, point me the way!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!